

Oct. 16, 2001

To: WASHINGTON STATE LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES  
WASHINGTON STATE FIRE DISTRICTS AND DEPARTMENTS

From: Executive Director, Washington State Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs  
Executive Director, Washington State Association of Fire Chiefs  
Chief, Washington State Patrol  
Secretary, Washington State Department of Health

Subject: **HANDLING SUSPICIOUS PACKAGES AND LETTERS**

As a result of the recent anthrax events in the nation, law enforcement and fire agencies throughout Washington State have been inundated with requests to assist in the handling of mail that has been deemed suspicious by private citizens and businesses. In light of that activity, we offer the following information:

Upon notification of a suspicious package, each responding agency should make a determination if there is A CREDIBLE THREAT present. Use everyday standard protocols for this assessment. **If the responding agency feels there is no credible threat, then screening resources need not be deployed.**

Once a fire or law enforcement agency has deemed a credible threat exists, it is critical for that agency to exercise current screening measures. For materials other than dry powder or paper, this must include screening for radiological, chemical and explosive materials. This should be done through locally available resources and/or through existing Memorandums of Agreements prior to forwarding suspicious items to the Washington State Public Health Laboratory (WSPHL).

The responding agency should also notify the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Several protocols on the identification, handling and opening of suspicious packages and letters have been disseminated by multiple entities in the country including the U.S. Postal Service, the National Domestic Preparedness Office, the Centers for Disease Control and the Washington State Patrol (WSP). If you need copies of these established procedures, contact the State Emergency Operations Office at Washington State Emergency Management (EMD), (800) 562-6108.

Copies of these documents and your own standard operating procedures should be available to your officers to use. In addition, the Centers for Disease Control has posted a useful health advisory, *How to Handle Anthrax and Other Biological Agent Threats*, at <[www.bt.cdc.gov/DocumentsApp/Anthrax/10122001Handle/10122001Handle.asp](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/DocumentsApp/Anthrax/10122001Handle/10122001Handle.asp)>; and anthrax threat guides are available at the Washington State Department of Health's website at <[www.doh.wa.gov/Alerts/Anthrax.htm](http://www.doh.wa.gov/Alerts/Anthrax.htm)>.

In the event your agency requires additional expertise to address the situation, contact your local emergency management office or 911 center to request regional response assets.

The WSPHL has provided guidance on how to submit samples for testing at their lab—*see the Washington State Department of Health's packaging and transport protocol, attached*. Please note that the WSPHL will only accept submissions after proper screening procedures have been instituted.

Adherence to the aforementioned procedures will help all agencies involved in these issues maximize the limited resources available.

*A final note:* Regional terrorism training is available through the WSP, State Fire Marshal Office, and Washington State Emergency Management. For more information, contact Ron Bowen at WSP, (360) 753-0357, or EMD at the number above.

Attachment:

1. *Washington State Department of Health Public Health Laboratories Specimen Packaging and Transport Protocol For Suspected Bioterrorism Incident.*

# Washington State Department of Health Public Health Laboratories Specimen Packaging and Transport Protocol For Suspected Bioterrorism Incidents

## Transporting specimens to the Washington State Department of Health Public Health Laboratories

- All specimens that meet the criteria for submission must be coordinated with your local health department first and then the Public Health Laboratory by calling 1-877-539-4344 a 24-hour emergency phone number. *No specimens will be accepted unless the Public Health Laboratory has been contacted prior to arrival of the specimen.*
- In most situations, local law enforcement, HAZMAT, Washington State Patrol or a FBI representative will transport the specimen directly to the Public Health Laboratory located at 1610 150<sup>th</sup> Street NE in Shoreline. Driving directions from I 5: Take exit N.E. 145<sup>th</sup> St. (WA-523); head east on 145<sup>th</sup> Ave NE; turn LEFT onto 15<sup>th</sup> Ave NE; turn RIGHT on NE 150<sup>th</sup>; the Public Health Laboratory will be on your left.
- In cases where the specimen is shipped by commercial carrier, ship according to State and Federal shipping regulations.

## Packaging specimens for testing at the Washington State Department of Health Public Health Laboratories

- Any specimen other than dry powder or paper material must be screened for chemical, radiological or explosive materials before it can be processed by the Washington State Department of Health Public Health Laboratories. Documentation of any screening must accompany the specimen to the laboratory.
- Place the specimen or a representative sample of the specimen in a plastic zip-lock bag, wipe the outside of bag with a solution of 9 parts water and 1 part household bleach, place a biohazard label on the bag, and follow steps 1-4.
  - 1 Place the zip-lock bag into a leak proof container with a tight cover that is labeled “biohazard.”
  - 2 Place this container into a second leak proof container with a tight cover that is labeled “biohazard.” The size of the second container should be no larger than a one-gallon paint can.
  - 3 Place the second container into a third leak proof container with a tight cover that is labeled “biohazard.” The third container should be no larger than a five-gallon paint can.
  - 4 Containers should meet state and federal regulations for transport of hazardous material, and be properly labeled.

